

FIGHT FOR EVERY SALE



By Nathan Lammers

The shift in the retail marketplace has been discussed at length in *The Fire Time Magazine*—and it's true. We're now back to reality. Customers are no longer lining up to give us their money. Before this summer, many dealers saw the slower traffic as an opportunity to catch up, take a breath, and reorganize. That has shifted into dealers waiting for the fall so traffic can ramp back up again. As such, we should be treating each potential sale as an opportunity and not a guarantee. Being an outside sales rep gives me the advantage of watching hearth shops of different sizes, in different markets, with different business models. Regardless of these variables, the consistent thing is the customers coming through the front door.

As Tim Reed, Grant Falco, and their crew have preached, consistent training is imperative to ensure that the right message is delivered on the sales floor. An incomplete or inaccurate message can postpone a sales decision—or, worse yet, result in customers buying from competitors.

Given that, I figured I'd share two sales situations I recently ran across, in hopes that the lessons I learned from each one can help you and your team succeed this burn season.

Situation 1: Developing Sales Flexibility

Are your employees able to sharpen their pencils in slow times or give a discount based on project size? I was recently in a fireplace shop with Matt Kolander, Sales Manager at Kozy Heat Fireplaces, while a customer was receiving a price on a new fireplace. Seeing the logos on our shirts, the customer asked about current specials. The honest answer was that there were no "official" promotions at the time. The customer left with a bid. When we were at dinner that night with the dealer, we discussed that interaction. If it was July and the dealer's schedule was open, would the store offer discounts to secure needed work? The answer was simple: "Of course!" Did salespeople have the authority to offer discounts to secure deposits and keep customers locked down? That answer was less definitive. After giving it some thought, here are my takeaways for dealers who aren't already implementing these practices.

First, empower your sales staff to get deposits. Give them some guidelines for discounting, and

then practice presenting the proper message. “Let me ask my manager” is a generic response that we’ve all heard, and not many people like it. A more refined response might be something like one of these lines:

- “If you place a deposit today, I can offer X% off of the materials.”
- “When we’re fully booked, we don’t offer discounts, but let me look at our schedule and see if there are any openings. If we can schedule you in the next 60 days and get a same-day deposit, I can offer you an X% discount.”

The hardest part of sales is the close. Even the most experienced salespeople can get queasy asking for the sale—but having a scripted closing question makes it easier.

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Situation 2: Overcoming Price Objections

Do you and your staff know how to politely discuss price objections? Although *actual* objections to price are infrequent, the *perception* that customers can’t afford what we’re selling is all too frequent.

Let’s discuss the first part: an actual price objection. Scott Coffman, the GM of Midwest Fireplace in Olathe, Kansas, and I recently had a customer who was price shopping (the guy was calling anywhere to find a better price). Scott did an excellent job of articulating why his price was the price. As he explained, “We spend tens of thousands of dollars on certification, tools, travel for training, etc. We handle product setup and warranty, and we guarantee customer satisfaction long after the product is installed. That doesn’t come cheap.”

This is a little trickier to explain to the end user without sounding like you’re bragging, but here are a few lines to help you do just that:

- “We may be more expensive than our competition, but it is worth it. We invest heavily in our techs and installers to ensure your project goes smoothly.”
- “We do not charge extra to ensure your project is up to your satisfaction. Many companies set the product in position and walk away. That’s not our policy. We’ll be involved with your project at no extra cost until you’re happy.”

Now, on to the second part: the perception that customers can’t afford something. Early in my career as a sales rep, working the fair and home show circuit was still a thing. (Many of you probably remember setting up tents and selling stoves in blistering heat. Those were the days!) It was imprinted on me then that you can never know what someone will pay for a good or service. There are a lot of \$12,000 hot tubs and \$400,000 tractors sold at these events. You can’t predict who will

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spend money based on their age, how they dress, or what they drive. Deliver a good sales pitch and shoot your shot. Let them—not you—decide if it's worth it.

All hearth products have their purpose, so I'm not picking on certain categories. That said, there are still too many instances where a salesperson takes the path of least resistance and sells a 36" builder box or log set to a customer whose project deserves better. Maybe that's because talking customers out of "cheap" gear gets confused with "upselling," which can make salespeople uncomfortable. But don't fall victim to this thinking. Offering your customers a better (and usually more expensive) fireplace option is a favor—not a trick. I think the following quote from Mr. Coffman clearly explains this last concept:

"Here's one of my favorite quotes that resonates when I think of the word 'cheap': 'The bitterness of poor quality remains long after the sweetness of low pricing is forgotten.' There are times when I speak to my customers and I flat out tell them, 'Hey, if I sell you this, you're going to hate my guts later!' This almost always gets customers' ears to perk up, and they will immediately ask me, 'Why?' At that point, they're allowing me to talk to them—and, more importantly, they're willing to listen to me about the quality, performance, and

fit and finish of an upgraded fireplace or manufacturer. The other thing I feel salespeople fail to see is that some customers come into the showroom and want the 'fine china' right from the get-go. Yet salespeople often insist on offering these customers 'Tupperware' instead. I believe many salespeople do this because they tell themselves that they would never pay for fine china. I preach that our sales staff should always take the fine china out of the cupboard and show it off. In a down market or a

slow time, you have only so many door swings and opportunities. By offering better quality products, your average sales ticket increases, which helps with your monthly and yearly numbers—not to mention your customers will *not* hate your guts!"

Simply put, every potential sale should be treated as an opportunity—not a guarantee—in today's economy. By empowering your sales team to offer discounts as needed and sharpening their closing techniques through sales practice, you can secure more deposits and lock down more commitments. You can also teach your team to address actual price objections with confidence and clarity by teaching them to explain the value your business offers. Finally, you can help salespeople overcome the misconception that customers can't afford your products by reminding them that you can't judge a book by its cover and encouraging them to take the china out of the cupboard. You can make the most out of this burn season by putting these simple strategies into practice and fighting for every sale. Thanks for giving this article a read. Have a prosperous fall!

